

All Sins Forgiven: This Is the Gospel

Mark 3:20-35

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. When the power of the Gospel shines brightly, people standing on the outside looking in, think something must be wrong. There our Lord was: proclaiming the Gospel, teaching the crowds. His family figured that something was amiss. Our Gospel text at Mark 3:21 says that Jesus' family "went out to seize him, for they were saying, 'He is out of his mind.'" John 7:5 says curtly, "For not even his brothers believed in him." But if you listened to His message, it sounded scandalous. The Gospel preached in its truth and purity doesn't fit human reason:

1. How can we be forgiven without some sort of contribution?
2. How can we be forgiven when our sin is so horrendously terrible?

The first objection to the Gospel insists that the Gospel must succumb to the rule of life that we learn from a very young age: "nothing is free." We swear on this principle of every-day experience. If we are to receive a promotion at work, we must work harder; if we are to receive better grades at school, we must work harder; if we are to nurture our intimacy in marriage, we must work harder; if we are to impress that boy or girl at school, we must work harder; if we are to improve athletically or artistically (as we pursue our various passions), we must work harder; if we would develop our prayer lives, we must pray more often; if we are going to trim down and lose some weight, we must work harder. The axiomatic principle *has to* qualify the Gospel right?! This is our deep-seated suspicion and even though we hear it preached to the contrary -- though there are many so-called "Christian churches" that do not -- we often sub-consciously qualify the Gospel:

1. I suspect that the forgiveness of sins means the Gospel + my efforts to be better father, mother, or child.
2. I suspect that the forgiveness of sins means the Gospel + my ability to love and forgive.
3. I suspect that the forgiveness of sins means the Gospel + my improved attitude toward the Word of God, worship and a life of prayer.
4. I suspect that the forgiveness of sins means the Gospel + my ability to overcome my addiction.
5. I suspect that the forgiveness of sins means the Gospel + the overcoming of my fears and doubts.

Some way, somehow -- we insist that though we say Christ's forgiveness to us is a free gift -- we *live* as though this just can't be right. It is as one gentleman once said to me after I shared the Gospel with him: "It sounds too good to be true."

How does this situation strike you? Are you tempted to think that this is “just the way it is”? Did you know Christian that this way of thinking is not an arbitrary thing? This is not just the way “it happens to be.” You know what propaganda is about; you’ve heard of the concept of “brain-washing,” and you have certainly heard about the power of subliminal messages. The realm of psychology and the way in which the media employs strategies for selling represent compelling reasons as to why people spend their money. I had jobs as a salesman when I was 18 years old. I sold Kirby Vacuum Cleaners and then I sold various electronics at Radio Shack. We had training in sales (and I am not implying that all companies or all sales personnel do what we did or what I did). We were trained to lead people to imagine their lives enhanced by what we were selling. Get the customer to envision themselves benefiting from the product. The approach was manipulative. Because of the way I trained, if I see a sales representative make his or her way to me today, I am tempted to cast up a cross to block them...I know it’s a terrible attitude, but all of this conjures up memories of my training back in the day.

Just for the record, I have reminded myself that if I am given time with a sales representative that it is in fact an opportunity to share the love of Jesus Christ. I suppose I’ve had time to reconsider my position about lifting up a cross and getting out the garlic.

But the idea that the Gospel is too good to be true is not happenstance...it is a strategic propaganda. It is the work of sin, the world, and the devil.

People were seeing and hearing the ministry of our Savior and “from Matthew 12:23 we learn that the people began to ask whether, after all, this was not ‘the Son of David,’ namely the Messiah. Their unbelief was breaking before this exhibition of Jesus’ power.” (Lenski, Gospel of Mark, 147)

The scribes who were against the Lord tried to capitalize on their doubt. They put forth their negative propaganda by suggesting that Jesus was so far from being the Messiah that he was in league with the devil himself. (Lenski, 147)

This is an extraordinary accusation and a very serious one to say the least. It captivates the attention of our Lord and leads our Savior to state one of the most serious warnings in the entire Word of God. It is a terrifying warning in and of itself, but it is one which we can live with – and in peace – if we know the Gospel!

But before I get to that, we must value how God’s Word pulls no punches about the reality of the devil and the existence of his demons. The Word of God teaches that the devil is “the ruler of this world” (Jn 12:31), so needless to say he is a real threat. As our Gospel text is teaching us, he detracts from Christ -- by trying to cloud how people know WHO our Lord is and by trying to confuse people on knowing WHAT our Lord did to save us – He is the liar and denier of the things of salvation. He wants you to go to hell. He fights so that you would lose your

faith. He is real and his threats are real. However – and at the same time – his authority is only what the Lord permits (cf Jb 1:12; Jn 16:11; 1 Pt 3:18-19). Yes, the devil is trying to manipulate, put forth his propaganda, and his subliminal and not so subliminal messages to crush your faith, but in our Gospel from Mark 3 this morning we learn about our protection. Thank God!

Satan goes on and on in conjunction with your sinful nature and the skepticism of the world: “your forgiveness could not possibly be for free...there must be many ‘plus signs’ that you must add to your salvation...the Gospel “plus” your doing this; the Gospel “plus” your ability to stop doing that, etc. He lies! He deceives! He is full of falsity, so that we finally learn the truth: “the best things in life really are free,” and none of them better than the Gospel. There are no + signs in the Gospel formula. All of your sins are forgiven through Christ alone! Period! Done! Finished! Complete! There is nothing to add! You’re forgiven!

So Jesus confronted those scribes! Satan cannot cast out Satan. To call Jesus Satan who is healing people from Satan is the height of bad thinking. It is totally illogical. It doesn’t work. It can’t be true. Anyone – and you don’t have to be a Bible scholar – can see that such a claim is ludicrous; ridiculous! Much to the contrary, Jesus has come to first to bind the strong man Satan and then having bound him, plunder his house. What does this mean? It means that when Jesus was confronted by the devil in the wilderness, he beat him. He bound him by superior power and might so that what Jesus does now is plunder the devil. That is, he delivers people from the devil’s realm (from darkness) into the realm of God, light, forgiveness and salvation.

So the Word of God teaches:

Colossians 1:13-14: “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

Jesus has fulfilled the prophets prediction that the tyrant was going down. The Lord is the “I” in this verse from Isaiah:

Isaiah 49:25: “For thus says the Lord: ‘Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken, and the prey of the tyrant be rescued, for I will contend with those who contend with you, and I will save your children.’”

Let’s permit Augustine to elaborate:

Ancient Christian Commentary (Volume II) 44: “He conquered the devil first by righteousness, and then by power. First by righteousness, because he who had no sin was slain by him most unjustly. But then by power, because having been dead he lived again, never afterwards to die. For Christ was crucified, not through immortal power, but through the

weakness which he took upon him in mortal flesh. Of this weakness the apostle nevertheless says, 'God's weakness is stronger than human strength.'"

45: "But there is something greater and more profound of comprehension: to see how the devil was conquered precisely when he was thought to be conquering, namely, when Christ was crucified."

This is the power of our Lord over the devil. But the devil doesn't give up. His other attempt to cloud the Gospel is not to lead you to add a "+" sign, but to introduce a minus "-": what I mean is that some go the other way: it is not that they are trying to ADD to the Gospel, but they are trying to SUBTRACT from the Gospel. How does one do that? Answer: by imagining that they have committed a sin or sins that are so terrible, so horrendous, so hellish, that they must be so far gone that they are even beyond the power of the Gospel to save. That this sin or these sins are so formidable that they render the Gospel less powerful and less effective. That is, these bring the Gospel lower than the sin and place the sin higher than the Gospel. Not possible. Nothing is higher than the Gospel.

Jesus saw what the scribes were doing, trying to take away from the Holy Spirit's work to bring hearts to faith. We are in the season of Pentecost and we must know that people come to faith and repentance only by the work of the Holy Spirit. How does the Holy Spirit do this? By presenting Jesus Christ...His saving person and work. The Holy Spirit puts Jesus before us and creates saving faith. But as Christ was here being put before the people, the scribes were trying to block him and "blaspheme" against the saving work of the Holy Spirit. "Blaspheme" means to demean or malign God, to accuse God of evil; to slander or curse God Himself. In the Old Testament this sin was to receive the death penalty and all hope was gone.

But nothing would hold back our Savior from proclaiming the truth of the Gospel:

Mark 3:28: "Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemes they utter,"

Did you hear that Christian?! All sins. ALL sins! ALL SINS!
The blood of Christ is stronger than any and all sins. There is no sin you can commit that can overcome the blood of Jesus Christ. His blood covers all sins. Any and every sin you've ever committed that tempted you to think you were too far gone, is also covered. You are not too far gone. There is no sin, none, zero, nada, zip, zilch that can overcome the forgiveness that Jesus has won for you. All sins means all sins.

But in our sinful skepticism we want to say, "But doesn't Jesus actually contradict himself? He says 'all sins,' but then teaches an exception to the rule, so in fact, 'all' does not mean 'all.'" But this is a false analysis and is essentially a category mistake.

What *does* our Lord say? He went on to say:

Mark 3:29: “but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin.”

We must understand what is being said.

It is not that all sins are not forgiven by Christ. They are, but the unforgivable sin is the rejection of this very Gospel/that all sins are forgiven. Luther warns (in Luther’s Works, American Edition 19:48-49) that we cannot despair (that our sin is too terrible for Jesus) or rely on good works. Both of these insist that the grace of God in Christ is inadequate. This is a rejection of the Gospel. Luther says simply, “All other sins which let grace triumph and reign are forgivable.” (AE 19:48-49)

But hear these words as well Christian: “We can never discern this towards other people. We can only use this as a warning. Yet we may say that whoever fears that he has committed the unpardonable sin thereby furnishes evidence that he has not done so. Nor can any man commit it inadvertently or unconsciously. Its commission is possible only when the Spirit, though the Word, has come to a man and has been clearly recognized as God’s Spirit with his divine power and grace to save [and then is rejected].” (Lenski, 156).”

At the end of our Gospel in Mark 3 we learn what really makes us belong to Jesus and this forgiveness we have been speaking of: it belongs to you who do the will of God. This is not about returning to the Law, but is the referring to THE living out of God’s will which is when by His grace we repent and believe...believe that ALL SINS means just that. All of our sins are forgiven. To believe in this; to rejoice in this is the will of God! It is not a call to subtract from the Gospel; it is not a call to add to the Gospel. It is a call to believe in the Gospel. To simply receive the truth: that Christ has forgiven ALL of your sins Christian and all means all. To believe in this Gospel invariably leads to the Christian life...a life that is at the end of the day, the very work of God!